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SUBJECT: GERMANY CONSIDERS OPENING DOORS TO IRAQI CHRISTIAN

REFUGEES

REF: BERLIN 421

Classified By: DEPUTY POLITICAL COUNSELOR STAN OTTO. REASONS: 1.4 (B) A  
ND (D).

11. (C) In the past several weeks, German politicians have begun a serious debate to allow up to 30,000 Iraqi Christian or other religious minorities to resettle in Germany, with German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble (CDU) pressing the hardest for swift action. On April 17, 2008, the state interior ministers of Germany's 17 states discussed a plan to resettle up to 30,000 Iraqi Christian refugees to Germany and agreed in principle to accepting the refugees. The plan, which Schaeuble has been championing, envisions three sets of 10,000 refugees arriving in Germany annually over the next three years. The persons would be permanently integrated in Germany and would not be required to petition for political asylum. These settlers would be processed as contingency refugees (Kontingentfluechtlinge) by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

12. (C) The Bundestag (Parliament) Committee on Human Rights has also appealed to the German government to let more Iraqi refugees enter the country. Committee Chairwoman Herthe Daeubler Gmelin (SPD) said at a recent hearing that "Germany must share its part of the burden." According to Christoph Ehrentraut of the Ministry of Interior's Refugee Department, over 72,000 Iraqi citizens have spent "some" time in Germany, with 5,760 Iraqis entering Germany under refugee status during 2007. MFA Iraq desk chief Dr. Ruediger Lotz noted that nearly 2 million Iraqi refugees are currently living in either Jordan or Syria. As a result, the MFA recently increased its assistance to these refugees to 3.7 million Euros for 2008 (Reftel). Lotz continued that nearly two-thirds of all Iraqi Christians have fled Iraq since the fall of Hussein's government and the concurrent rise in Islamic fundamentalism. Still, he notes, the MFA is urging that the new category incorporate all "religious minorities persecuted in Iraq" and not just Christians. Lotz believes this would broaden the appeal of the overall plan.

13. (C) The EU, however, seems reluctant to follow suit with a religion-based refugee category. While Schaeuble may have hoped for a more positive response from his EU colleagues, the EU Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Committee meeting on April 18 in Luxembourg yielded little movement. The Slovenian Presidency made it clear that EU decisions in the area of asylum could not be based on religion. According to Ehrentraut, Germany will continue to raise this issue in the hope that agreement can be reached at the next JHA meeting in May.

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